

Stockings by rosekings

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Gen, el and max talk about el's real name, featuring snowball fights, please let these girls be friends in s3, totally christmas-themed

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Summary:

“Max?”

“Yeah?”

“Why do people put big socks on their fireplaces?”

Stockings

Author's Note:

A ficlet based off of a prompt from Tumblr for Holly Jolly Ficmas! Technically this is for day 20 ('Stockings') but could also be mashed with day 3 ('Snowball Fight').

“That was *cold*, El!” Max yells. She scoops up a handful of snow, packs it together, and launches it in Eleven’s direction. El shrieks, diving to the left for cover. As the snowball passes her and smashes into a tree, she comes up with an idea that’s sure to win her the battle.

“El, come on, you’re not scared of a little snowball, are you?” Max teases.

Eleven comes out from behind the tree, fifty or so snowballs levitating around her. Max’s grin drops clean off her face, and El sends all the snowballs rocketing at her. Max turns tail and runs, swearing at the top of her lungs and red hair flying as the hard-packed snow hits the trees and her back. Eleven collapses to the ground, laughing until her ribs hurt, and finally Max stops running.

“Well played, El,” she says, trudging back through the snow. “You win.”

“Yes,” El says, still laughing. “I think I do.”

Max drops down next to her. Once Mike had told Eleven what Max Mayfield had done with them, done *for* them, and reassured her that Max would never ever replace El in the party, she had apologized to Max as soon as she could, not wanting to alienate this girl who had fought tooth and nail to become their friend. Now, five weeks after the closing of the gate, they’re as close as El is to anyone else in the party. Max is always nice to her, teaching her how to be your typical, telekinetic teenage girl. Occasionally, if she’s in a good mood, she’ll even show El how to ride a skateboard.

Most importantly, Max will answer almost any question El has for her, and something El saw on TV a few days ago has been preying on her mind.

“Max?”

“Yeah?”

“Why do people put big socks on their fireplaces?”

Max looks at her, eyebrows knitted together in confusion. “Big socks?” She stares into the forest for a moment, snowflakes drifting down and settling on her bright red hair. “Oh! You mean stockings?”

“Yes, those.”

“Um - usually they have your name on them, and you hang them above the fireplace, on this thing called the mantle,” Max explains. “You get candy - and sometimes other stuff - to eat on Christmas.”

“Oh.” Eleven lays back in the snow, watching each unique and glittery snowflake fall through the trees. “We don’t have any stockings,” she says. They have a tree, and gifts underneath, and some festive candles around the place, but no stockings. Her and Hopper’s cabin is just a ten-minute walk away from them - after loads of begging from the two girls, Hopper had *barely* agreed to let them go outside.

“It’s not hard to get some,” Max says, absently drawing in the snow. “I’m sure Mrs. Henderson would knit two for you and Hopper. Or you could just buy a couple and Sharpie your names on them.”

Eleven is about to agree that that’s a great idea, but then realizes there’s an issue. “My name has to be on it?”

Max nods. “It’s tradition.” *Tradition* was a word that El had to look up in her dictionary, after Dustin had said that it was tradition for them to almost die every November. After she learned what the word meant, she realized he had been making a joke. She didn’t see how it was funny.

“My real name?”

“Well, yeah, why wouldn’t you -” Max stops mid-sentence, and Eleven watches the whole process of Max realizing that ‘011’ isn’t El’s actual name. Aside from the people that already know, El has told only one other person her real name: Mike.

“You know your *real name*? You’ve got *two names*?!” Max yells, jumping up. El squints as the redhead looms over her, blocking out the sunlight. “That is so cool! You’re like a secret agent!”

“Secret agent?”

“Never mind. So what is it? What’s your name?”

El hesitates for a moment, and Max freezes and shakes her head.

“Wow, I’m sorry, El - really, you don’t have to tell me - it doesn’t matter anyways - ‘El’ suits you, so don’t worry about it - that was super insensitive - sorry.” She blurts all of this really quickly and takes a deep breath once she’s done. She stands there, staring at El, and El feels absolutely horrible for the worry in Max’s eyes.

“Jane Ives,” she whispers.

“Oh,” Max says, taken aback. She promptly drops down next to Eleven. “That’s - that’s a nice name.”

“I thought about making that my name. No more Eleven from the lab,” El says. “But I’m not Jane. I’ve never been Jane.” She gestures emptily with her hands, at a loss for the right words. It’s frustrating, something she goes through all the time and *hates*, because she can never say what she means.

“You’ve never felt like you were yourself when you were Jane,” Max says. Eleven nods vigorously, glad that Max understands.

“Yes. Mike and Lucas and Dustin and Will - and you - gave me ‘El.’ That’s...who I am. The people I love - they know me as Eleven. I don’t want to be anyone else.”

Max smiles, squeezing El’s freezing hand. “Then Eleven is who you are. Besides,” she adds, getting to her feet and shaking the snow off her legs, “‘Eleven’ is way cooler than ‘Jane.’”

El grins and stands up, brushing snowflakes out of her curls. “Thank you, Max.”

“Anytime. Come on, I want a snowball fight rematch.”

On Christmas morning, there are two red-and-gold stockings hanging from the mantle of the Hopper residency. One says ‘Jim’ in blue thread. The other, in pink thread, says ‘Eleven.’